



Press Release

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New Study to Examine Impact of Increased Family Visitation on Young People in Juvenile Correctional Facilities

Study in Indiana aims to inform juvenile justice leaders about how to keep incarcerated youth and their families connected

NEW YORK, NY (January 13, 2013) — Little is known about how family contact affects incarcerated young people, although exploratory research by the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) suggests that increased family visitation is connected to better educational outcomes and behavior in these young people. To examine this association more closely, Vera will conduct a [two-year study](#) to determine the effect of expanded family visitation policies on youth in placement at the [Indiana Department of Correction, Division of Youth Services \(DYS\)](#), both while in custody and following reentry to their homes and communities. The study will examine recent changes to DYS policies that have expanded families' visitation opportunities to as many as six days a week.

The study is funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

"By involving parents in the treatment process and bringing them into the correctional environment, we can improve reintegration planning and long-term outcomes for youth when they are released back to the community," said Mike Dempsey, the executive director of DYS. "Regardless of the nature of a child's relationship with his parents, it is clear that we need to actively nurture and help support that relationship."

Indiana DYS was one of two sites to pilot the [family engagement standards](#) Vera developed with the Performance-based Standards Learning Institute in 2012. The standards help agencies and juvenile correctional facilities identify, monitor, and improve family engagement in all aspects of the youths' incarceration. During the pilot, Indiana DYS discovered that visitation was an area for improvement. They changed their policy at the beginning of 2013

and saw visitation rates double within a few months.

Vera will examine the impact of the increase in family visits on young people's behavioral and educational outcomes. Vera will also study the impact, if any, of enhanced visitation policies on recidivism rates for young people released from juvenile correctional facilities. By providing insight into the effects of expanded visitation, the study may have significant policy implications for the many state agencies and family advocacy and support groups eager to learn how best to support juveniles in correctional settings.

"We are thrilled to have the opportunity to study Indiana's policy change and to work with OJJDP to shed more light on the benefits of family visits for youth," said Margaret diZerega, director of Vera's [Family Justice Program](#).

Vera's Family Justice Program provides training, technical assistance, and research to help community-based organizations and government agencies—such as corrections, parole and probation, and juvenile justice entities—adapt their case management styles to be strength-based and family-focused.

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